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ABSTRACT

A university faculty member and a retired elementary principal developed a practicum course for preservice students entering a 1-year post-baccalaureate program. The course included on-campus and in-school experiences. The two professionals met frequently to get to know one another, examine course requirements, and determine what unique knowledge and skills each had and what forums were best for them. They determined the most opportune times to direct students' thinking (during weekly reflective discussions following micro-teaching sessions in one of the schools and during the seminar segments of weekly counseling group sessions at the university). They kept journals, held periodic discussions, and soon discovered they had different expectations regarding students' skill levels and different ideas of the purpose, nature, and extent of dialogue. They learned the importance of considering individual reactions from each other's perspectives. Over time, they became more comfortable with each other's approaches and with student growth. There were concerns over their ability to apply professional knowledge properly, to help students reflect at progressively higher levels, and to help students benefit from the practicum, but the concerns were not overly restrictive. They believe their success was due to their similar views about the value of others and the purpose of education. Several principles related to separate dimensions of teaching directed their actions (reflection, socialization, and the ethic of caring). They believe other collaborative arrangements may fail without such conditions. (SM)

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A Collaborative Venture in Preservice Education:
Participant Practices and Learnings

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While the literature on teacher education reform often promotes collaborative enterprises which see universities and public schools working together to prepare teachers (see for example, Holmes Group, 1986; Irvin, 1990; Joyce & Clift, 1984), there is a dearth of information on the value or benefits of such enterprises from the personal perspectives of those involved. In light of this need, the two of us examined our own perspectives as participants in one particular venture. This paper shares some of the thoughts and reactions we had as we worked together, as well as some of the insights we ultimately gained as a result of this experience.

Before delving into our learnings, a description of our collaborative arrangement is in order. We met and began our work together one year ago when we were placed in charge of a practicum course for a group of 23 preservice students entering a one year post-baccalaureate program in a university in Ontario. Our role was to include arranging, supervising and evaluating three separate practicum placements for each of these students over the year (for a total of ten weeks of practice teaching), as well as conducting weekly whole group sessions that focused on specific course topics and assignments, along with any other issues we chose to include that were related to the students' development as teachers. As such, the course included on-campus as well as in-school experiences as a full course credit.

What first made this partnership a collaborative one was the

nature of our backgrounds: one of us came as a university faculty member with eleven years experience leading just such practicum groups as well as teaching various curriculum courses; the other came as a freshly retired elementary school principal with a high profile of involvement and expertise in school, staff and curriculum development. In addition, however, the arrangement was collaborative in that it called for both of us to work closely with specific area schools over the year. In one school, this involved arranging for students to present video-taped micro-lessons and engage in follow-up reflective group discussions on the lessons, while in other schools it involved arranging mutually acceptable extended practicum placements that matched small selected groups of students and cooperating teachers. Beyond this, we were also to liaise with all parties in our larger assigned school area to facilitate a flow of ideas among student teachers, teachers, principals, and university faculty that could lead to improvements in the field experience program. What was particularly unique about our role in all these efforts was that we were to work with one separate group (referred to as a counselling group) and the two of us (referred to as counsellors) were to incorporate all of these various collaborative operations in the one "course". As well, we were not two full time faculty responsible for this, but rather one professor and one part time, "school" expert. Neither of us initially regarded this arrangement as unrealistic, however, and we began the year willing to work with each other and in the process to learn from each other.

Our Thoughts-in-Action

Schön's recent work (1983, 1987) has given much credence to the notion that there is such a thing as practical experiential knowledge and that this kind of knowledge is somewhat intuitive in nature and is embedded in the act of doing. Schön argues convincingly that we often think about what we are doing while we are actually doing it, and that we use this sort of reflection-in-action to help us deal with situations and adjust our practice. This notion underlies the content of this section on our in-action thoughts and concerns as we actually went about our work. Later in the next section, we look back upon our performance as an event in the past, and reflect-on-action to gain a broader understanding of our thoughts and actions.

Building the Relationship

Initially, we met several times before the course began in order to get to know one another and to examine the course requirements as they related to our own backgrounds and personal outlooks. We sought early on to determine what unique knowledge and understandings each of us had to offer, and what particular forums would allow each of us to impart our particular understandings most effectively.

What we realized early on was that it was difficult to be clear about what each of us saw as important, and what each of us wanted to develop in students. To a university professor, what was important was developing the student's ability to think at a level

that would allow them to critique what goes on in education. To a principal, the concern was more with developing the student's ability to capitalize on their own experiences and learn from their own teaching.

We had little difficulty accepting the legitimacy of each other's goals, but it was difficult to determine how we would arrange and structure our practicum course to promote the importance of both sorts of learnings in the students. We agreed that the two most opportune times to direct our students' thinking would seem to be during the weekly reflective discussions following the micro-teaching sessions in one of the schools, and during the seminar segments of the weekly counselling group sessions in the university. We felt that the two of us had sufficient expertise to facilitate discussions around teaching episodes and course topics, and to promote in these discussions a consideration of different perspectives. It was with a somewhat blind trust in each other's abilities at this point, then, that we agreed to meet our students to begin to determine their needs. We did decide, however, that it would be wise to keep personal logs or journals as the course unfolded, and to focus discussion on these at times. We sensed that our personal reflections would not likely lead to any great depth of understanding unless we also discussed them with each other, and this confirmed a shared belief in the power of dialogue and conversation.

Within a week of beginning the course, we were already sharing reflections and voicing concerns. What became obvious almost

immediately was how different our expectations had been regarding our students' skill levels. It seemed that while we had been able to articulate what general understandings and behaviors we wanted to see develop in our students, we had each possessed a different schema about their entry level. We had not realized that years of experience in preservice education allow university faculty to anticipate what level of classroom competency a novice will display, but that school principals do not possess such a schema since their work in schools makes them familiar only with more advanced beginners, or with fully experienced teachers.

We had to ask ourselves just how reasonable it was to have a school principal involved in an initial teacher preparation program. Given our differing reactions to our students' entry levels, would we agree on decisions related to the order of their professional learning? Would we agree on where each student most needed help or on how much practical competence they would need before they could perform at higher levels and question their own ideas and practices? These concerns were real to us, but with little actual time to discuss them, we worked at considering these sorts of questions from each other's perspective to gain a clearer sense of each other's frame of reference.

What also emerged during this process was an awareness that our outlooks differed somewhat regarding the need to confer and achieve consensus on all issues. While both of us had readily espoused a belief in the importance of shared dialogue, what surfaced was a realization that we had a somewhat different sense

of the purpose, nature, and extent of such dialogue. Since one of us was a university professor from a culture that traditionally promotes and reflects pluralism and autonomy among its members (Clark, 1987), and the other was a school principal whose career efforts had been directed to promoting high-consensus schools where collaboration and joint decision making were the norm (Rosenholtz, 1989), we had not possessed a shared identity or notion of what was meant by working together.

As we began interacting more closely with our students, we learned how important it was to keep considering our individual reactions and concerns from each other's perspective, and not to be surprised when we interpreted and acted upon situations differently. The reality of the survivability factor in our students' lives was one of the issues that forced this type of realization and resulted in important learnings for both of us. A school principal came to accept that it was not unusual for even our most capable students to be remarkably insecure each time they were placed in a new environment, and that many more hours of guidance and practice were likely to be needed to help them move to that stage of independence where they could actually describe and construct the meaning of classroom events. A university instructor relearned that the students' ability to cope at higher levels might best be promoted not by increasing the focus on intellectual growth or cognitive understandings, but by fostering a sense of group or community that extolled the value of working together. These sorts of awarenesses served as evidence to us that we were learning from

each other's practices, and that we were clarifying our notions of how we wanted our group sessions with the students to operate.

Changes occurred first in the weekly discussion periods that followed the video-taped micro-teaching sessions. Here we found ourselves striving to provide the support we agreed was needed to foster professional growth. It became difficult at times to watch a student's lesson and not jump in and stop the lesson when it was going very poorly, or spend great amounts of time after the lesson elucidating on alternate strategies that should have been employed. Instead, we worked at treating the lesson as a learning experience for all, and at having the whole group discuss the experience in that light. We intervened with questions and comments, but we were anxious to maintain a supportive environment. Both of us learned quickly that we had to avoid one of two extremes here: either having the sessions develop into agonizing whole group reappraisals of each student's performance, or having the sessions become nothing more than uncritical cheerleader forums. Consequently, we tried to focus on growth patterns and to foster self esteem that was based in reality.

We also became attentive in our regular weekly counselling group sessions at the university to fostering a similar sense of community. Because teachers need a supportive group structure in their teaching careers as well as in their preservice year, we set out to simulate the environment of the ideal school where individuals are empowered and a sense of community is fostered. The seminar segment of each counselling group session became the

forum for developing this. Pairs of students became responsible for one of the required course topics and were expected to lead the presentation on this topic to the rest of us on "staff." As a group, the rest of us would then move to consider, discuss, and construct meaning. In this context, our comments and reactions were actively sought out. "What do school principals do in this situation?" "What does the university promote in this area?" What we came to realize here how essential it was for both of us to provide consistently appropriate modelling that was linked to a philosophy of personal professionalism. Each member of the group, including the two of us, had opportunities in this environment to serve as both teacher and learner.

Harboring Concerns

As the year progressed, we became consistently more comfortable with our approach and with the growth we were observing in our students. Certain events caused both of us concern, however, and served to promote questions of our own.

The first of these concerns surfaced each time it became painfully clear that the students still had much to learn. Demonstrations of minimal competence, either in discussions or in teaching, suggested an inability to call upon and apply professional knowledge correctly, and this frequently gave rise to the question: Were we doing enough in these situations to assist our students? But the problem for us was that our notions on how to assist were often in conflict with our overall course goals.

The inclination to step in immediately and provide the information or give a quick demonstration lesson was strong. But this was contradictory to the professional learning orientation the two of us had already worked to establish, which would see the group community cultivating its own wisdom. What also added to our concern was the fact that the students would at times seek out our intervention and then suggest that we provide more. This made us uncomfortable, and we disagreed at times as to whether such a request was a sign of insecurity and lack of self confidence on the part of our students, or a sign of maturity and willingness to seek direction when it was needed.

Closely connected was our second concern about how to help the students reflect at progressively higher levels. While we knew that sufficient field experience was needed to evaluate one's own teaching objectively, the problem was that sometimes field experiences resulted in students adopting a false sense of security in their own ability. We worried about how best to alleviate this problem as well as how to get students back on track when they misinterpreted their level of mastery.

Finally, the concern that was the most pressing was whether our students were ultimately benefitting from their practicum. What we sensed as the year progressed was that practice teaching was at times actually counterproductive. Our main problem was how to recruit enough cooperating teachers who could model the use of collaborative strategies to examine their own teaching and learning. The educational system has not been noted for

emphasizing the role of the teacher as change agent (Goodlad, 1990), and in reality there were few teachers available to us who had already had opportunities for self-directed professional development. We were not so much worried that the field experience would fail to provide opportunities for our students to learn from their own teaching, because we were involved in supervising their performance, and hence had sufficient opportunities to influence their learning. What concerned us more was that the experiences could fail to provide opportunities to learn to become career-long learners. If the schools our students entered were far from being supportive structures that housed inquiring communities, this sent a powerful message to our students about the school culture, and we were well aware that lessons learned during student teaching could significantly alter students' outlooks (Zeichner et al., 1987). We harbored this concern for most of the year, and even as our students left at the end of the year we wondered about the impact of our message in relation to the impact of their future school environments.

While these concerns described here remained with us much of the year, it needs to be stressed that they were not overly restrictive in the sense of inhibiting our decision making or our actions. In fact, the sense we had was that deliberation on such concerns was part of what was involved in teaching teachers, and that dealing with uncertainties was to be expected. We simply went about our job, and as we lived the experience we learned and readjusted and moved on to the next experience.

Our Post-Action Thoughts

While the previous section focussed on our thoughts about what we were doing while we were actually doing it, this section focuses on our thoughts about our experience as an event in the past. Schön points out that reflecting on an event after it is over allows one to explore the understandings brought to that event and to consider in more depth why one acted in a specific way.

When we began to look back over our year, we recognized that our initial ideas about collaboration and about what we wanted to accomplish together had not been well developed at all, and that whatever knowledge and beliefs had consequently directed our decisions and actions over the year had operated more or less at an implicit level. Our reflection at the end of the year, fuelled by reading the literature as well as rereading our journals, was what helped us to clarify our thinking and recognize and articulate a number of insights. These are summarized here under two categories, along with implications flowing from them.

The Demands of Collaboration

We questioned what had brought us together in the first place and what had kept us working together. On a surface level it was obvious that we shared a concern for teacher education and that we both saw teacher education as the responsibility of the school system as well as the university. But surely there was more to it than this, for it seemed one thing to espouse such a belief, and quite another then to work with someone to make a collaborative

venture successful. This required a stronger bonding, the kind that grows out of a mutual commitment to a vision. Our visions had never been particularly well articulated, however, so something else must also have driven our efforts. We settled on the notion that we had both been determined to cooperate with the other. It took us some time to verbalize this notion, however, and to recognize that mutual support and acceptance cannot be taken for granted. We had tended to use one another as reality checks for our thinking over the year, but we would surely not have continued this practice if we had sensed a negative response. Did one of us "give and take" more than the other in such interactions? No doubt, but we have yet to reach agreement on who did, and on whether the locus of control in our interactions was internal or external. We wondered about inequality of power in the relationship, and whether this was a factor in our perceptions of each other's contributions. Our conclusion was that both of us had deferred to the other on a number of occasions over the year and that we had done this because it seemed the sensible thing at the time. Perhaps because we had each brought age, experience and an adequate self-concept to the decision, we had not worried about what power we were or were not wielding at the time.

It became clear to us that this willingness to turn power over to others is a necessary condition in a collaborative venture. As well, the individuals involved must be willing to accommodate different views, and to wait patiently while others consider, reflect and learn. Finally, each party must also take the time

needed for private personal reflection. If this was difficult even in our case where the principal was not constrained by any administrative or school duties, we had to wonder how other collaborative ventures could prove successful if school personnel retained their regular duties as well. The demands of collaboration are many, and if those involved are not willing to build and maintain a supportive structure, the collaborative venture will not succeed. In short, the worlds of the university and the school will not be easily tied together if the project participants do not make the venture a priority.

The Dimensions of Teaching

We had agreed right from the beginning of the year that our basic task was to promote the professional development of our students. It took us time to work out our thoughts, however, and to build the kind of environment we felt would promote this growth. When we reflected on our experience, it became clear that a number of principles had directed our actions, and that these were related to separate dimensions of teaching.

Reflection. We had clearly been directed by a belief that teacher growth would not occur without reflection. We wanted students to go beyond learning concepts, to the point where they could use concepts to analyze teaching. The challenge we faced in promoting this dimension of teaching was how to ensure reflection at consistently higher levels. At the time, we failed to appreciate fully how the structure we worked within was actually ideal for

this. Our counselling group model embodied the structure recommended by Tickle (1987) who contends that it is programs allowing novices, teachers and university advisors to study teaching together that lead to the level of reflection that brings about the greatest teacher growth. In our case, the fact that the university advisors included a school principal and a professor made the arrangement even more ideal.

Despite ideal conditions, however, we realized that we had been less than ideally prepared for certain realities. We would "forget" at times how students need long stretches of time in schools if they are to develop that broad base of understanding and objectivity needed for productive reflection. When we found ourselves disappointed with some students' superficial, judgmental descriptions of the technical aspects of their own or another's teaching, then, it would have been more productive of us to consider how we ourselves could do a better job ensuring greater preparation for reflection. We also "forgot" at times that reflection can create tension in certain novices, and that we should be attuned more closely to personal dilemmas. When novices can articulate their beliefs and values, and paint a clear vision of their role as teacher, it can be crushing to discover that in actual practice they are not performing in ways they see as ideal. We were pleased when our students took a risk and trusted the group enough to reveal something of themselves, but then as counsellors we were not always ready to react with the sensitivity needed.

Given such inadequacies on our parts, we asked ourselves just

how much we actually did promote productive reflection in our students. Perhaps our ultimate goal had been less directed to bringing about personal growth than to having the students think like we did. In debating this, we became aware of somewhat opposing frameworks here. To professors, the notion that others might think differently is generally quite acceptable, but principals accustomed to aiming for unity and coherence among staff members can find it more difficult to celebrate diversity and/or autonomy. This could prove to be a substantial problem in school-university collaborations that attempt to promote reflection, because reflective teachers won't emerge unless those responsible for the training will give up control and then encourage and support the teachers as they move through reflective stages.

Socialization. Closely connected to the reflective dimension of teaching is the social dimension. Wildman and Niles (1987) point out that while systematic reflection is driven by the individual, it is the social and collegial group structures that provide the support needed. Some researchers (e.g., Hoy & Rees, 1977; Tabachnick, Popkewitz & Zeichner, 1979-80) have described what occurs as teachers become socialized into teaching, and still others (e.g., Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1986; Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981; Zeichner, Tabachnick & Densmore, 1987) have stressed that the power of the school is much stronger than that of the university.

Knowing all this, we had to examine why it was, then, that we had continued all year to strive to create a strong sense of group among our students. One of us, as principal, had initially

promoted this "ideal school" environment in the group, but the other as professor had agreed because of a belief that the best schools do indeed operate in this fashion.

Looking back on the overall operation, two things struck us. The first was how willingly our students had adopted our school staff model and put into practice all the behaviors we called for. Every member of the group modelled respect and courtesy toward the others, and they provided tremendous support systems for one another all year long. Valuable friendships formed and a cohesiveness emerged that demonstrated clearly that differences in gender, age, race, colour, and religion were of no significance. What seemed to matter to these students was that they all "belonged" and were part of this community. The second behavior that surprised us was that our students had remained reluctant to pass judgments about what they observed outside our group. While they might well have noted differences in the staff model we were following and the staff models they encountered during some of their practicum sessions, they refrained from derogatory comments.

Our first response to our observations was to marvel at the maturity and professionalism our group had exhibited and to be somewhat self-congratulatory about the extent of our influence. Upon reflection, however, we conceded that our influence might have been much weaker than we cared to admit, and that the students' behaviors might have been based in other realities. They might well have "gelled" simply because they were social beings with a strong urge to belong and be accepted. They might well have

refrained from negativism simply because we had pushed for compliance and they had fed us back what they knew we wanted. Despite such side trips, which illustrate how we did indeed doubt ourselves and our influence, we prefer to remain optimistic, and to believe in the power of group. The socialization into teaching is complex indeed, but if the sense of belonging and working together is established at the very beginning of the teacher training, its power may well be far reaching.

Ethic of Caring. In our search to attend to the literature on teacher development and preservice education, one particular article impacted strongly on us, and led us to realize suddenly just how we had developed over the year and how our beliefs and practices could be placed into a larger framework. The article is one by Welker (1991) which questions the metaphor of teacher as expert, and points out that what is missing in this conception of the teacher is adequate attention to the moral and social responsibilities of teachers. What this led us to realize was that in essence, pedagogical knowledge, skill development and cognitive growth had all concerned us as we worked with our students, but not to the extent that the image of teacher as nurturer and caregiver had. We came to realize that what we had placed most emphasis on as the year continued were the social and affective variable of caring for students, of relating to them, and of having patience and understanding in dealings with them.

What had directed much of our work over the year, then, had been a need to give caring a central place in our course and to

make it a touchstone of our practice. This seemed suddenly to explain the bonding between us. We had believed, if only at an implicit level, that caring teachers are not likely to evolve unless teacher educators model caring relationships with preservice students and give these students the opportunity to build the kinds of relationships with others that promote caring (Noddings, 1986). The structure of our counselling group, which allowed for the same 23 students to have continuous extended contact with one another and with the two of us was actually ideal for this. As well, the opportunity this group structure provided all of us to reflect and talk about our actions through genuine dialogue was also ideal. The students could interact to construct an ethic of caring, while we as leaders could reconstruct and refine our thinking about our own behaviors.

Within this framework, our attention to promoting reflection, encouraging social interaction, and stressing certain growth patterns made new sense to us. These were what we had seen as the components needed to develop as a caring teacher. Individually, we might each have initially stressed different components, but together we had come to realize that all were important and essential.

Conclusion

This paper has shared our thoughts, concerns, and insights as participants in a school-university collaborative venture. We have tried to make it clear that we valued our year together and that we

learned much from each other and from the 23 students we worked with. We are not at all convinced that most school-university collaborations can succeed as well, however. In our case, success was no doubt due to the fact that we both held the same views about the worth and value of others and about the ultimate purpose of education. As well, of course, the counselling group context we found ourselves in was as close to the ideal as one could get if interaction and shared learning are the desired outcomes. We sense that other collaborative arrangements are more likely doomed to failure early on, however, if these sorts of conditions are not met.

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